



## **GLU Students' Handbook for Germany**

Updated 2015

*Dear LPGs!*

*We are happy to introduce our “Survival Handbook for Germany” to you, in which we have tried to provide some essential tips and tricks to you about life in Germany. This handbook is designed to be an open document where everyone can add his or her ideas. So if you have made any experiences or discoveries about life in Germany which could be useful to your colleagues, please feel free to share them here, so that the next generations of LPGs can benefit from them. If you add any information to this handbook, please mention the date, so that others can identify the most up to date version.*

*We wish you an inspiring and memorable experience with the GLU!*

*Nora, Natale and Tandiwe (Alumni LPG 8, 2011-2012)*

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## 1. Accommodation

### 1.1 Private accommodation in a shared flat

Both in Kassel and in Berlin you can choose to look for private accommodation instead of opting for student housing. Finding private accommodation is more time-consuming and sometimes a bit more expensive (or cheaper, depending on the location) than student housing, but you might be rewarded with an in-depth experience of (student) life in Germany, which can be a great experience if you are staying with nice people. You can either search for a one-room studio where you will live on your own, or you can search for a room in a shared flat with other German or international students. Living in a shared flat (*WG*) is recommended because you don't have to bother about all the administrative issues such as managing water and electricity bill, because this will be done by your flatmates who are already living in the flat. In Germany it's very common for students to live in shared flats, but everyone has his or her own room in the flat (kitchen/ bathroom are shared). Many students who live in a shared flat offer their room for sub-renting (*Zwischenmiete*) when they go abroad or to another city for one semester. So you would have to look for a room which is offered as *Zwischenmiete* (sub-renting).

**These two websites are used commonly to find such rooms: [www.wg-gesucht.de](http://www.wg-gesucht.de) and [www.studentenwohnung.de](http://www.studentenwohnung.de)**

At least the main search functions in *WG-gesucht* is offered in English also, After clicking on the "English" button (upper right corner of the home page) you type the kind of room you are searching for: which city, from when to when you wanna stay, how much rent maximum, and most importantly you have to click on "*Zwischenmiete*" (this normally means that the room will be fully furnished).

The website will then give you a list of offers from people who are offering a room for sub-renting in their flat. Most of the descriptions will be in German, but you may use google translator to get a rough translation into English. Most importantly you should type the address of the place into google maps and then get the directions from there to the addresses of ICDD in Kassel and Berlin School of Economics in Berlin in order to see how far you will have to travel.

If the room sounds good and you're interested in contacting the respective person you can send him/her a message in which you introduce yourself and express your interest for the room. People offering a room will get MANY messages, so here it is VERY important that you consider the following aspects while sending a message to the person offering a room:

- Write a brief and nice intro about yourself (where you're from, what you're doing in Germany etc.) mentioning the exact period for which you are searching for a room (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30 September, for Berlin). If you have a facebook account, you may copy the link so that people can get an idea of you. If you speak several languages mention them.
- Try to present a nice image of yourself so that people are motivated to share their place with you. Aspects which you might put (if applicable): friendly, open, easy-going person, sociable and communicative but also respects the private sphere of others, clean and tidy when it comes to shared spaces (bathroom/kitchen), etc.
- Mention your email ID and that you are willing to arrange a skype date so that people can get an idea of you how you are as a person (it would be best if you could go and

visit the place before moving in, but in most cases this will not be possible, so offer at least a skype date)

You can write this text once and then copy/paste it to all the messages that you wanna send, just make sure to address the respective person with name if mentioned in the contact details. It's normal to send requests to around 20 people and getting a reply of maybe 5-10, so the more requests you send to flat offers which are suitable the better. If people reply to your message, make sure to answer asap as they won't wait for you.

### **Many flat offers are also posted on the "reflect-info" mailing list**

This is a list which started as a political mailing list for announcing political and cultural events in Berlin. The list is now increasingly used to post offers of free rooms in shared flats. You can subscribe to the list on:

<https://listi.jpberlin.de/mailman/listinfo/reflect-info>

If you are on this website, it is advisable to click on "yes" behind the question "Would you like to receive list mails batched in a daily digest", so that you receive daily summary of mails sent via that list instead of the individual emails. This list has already helped many people to find a flat and it informs you about political and cultural events in the city, so it might be worth subscribing and then you can unsubscribe once you leave Berlin.

### **Some notes on living in a shared flat**

Congrats if you have managed to find a place in a private shared flat! Even if you have lived in a shared place before with others than your family, here are some cultural tips on how to make it a good experience in Germany:

- Communication about problems: Germans are quite straightforward, so if there's anything which disturbs you in the flat (i.e. you are keeping common spaces clean but the others don't), speak about it asap with your flatmates in a calm and friendly way. Tell them also that if they have any problems with your behaviour they should tell you immediately so that you can find a solution which is fine for all.
- Socializing: The living experience is normally much better if you are open and communicative with your flatmates, i.e. asking them how their day was or offering to cook and eat dinner together, so that you get to know each other better and living together is easier.

## **1.2 Student Housing**

See GLU welcome booklet and information from the programme coordinator.

## **2. Travelling**

### **2.1 Bahn.de**

#### General booking

In order to book a train ticket very quickly and conveniently we recommend the website of the Deutsche Bahn (<http://www.bahn.com>), which is also available in different languages. There are many possibilities to search about tickets, destination or tourist information around travelling. Especially on the left side you can search for destination, prices and booking possibilities. In order to book an online ticket you will have to create an account and identify yourself on the train via Credit or EC card.

It is also possible to book train tickets at the "DB Fahrkartenautomat" (Ticket machine) which you will find in every train station and where you can choose to have all the information in English language. Finally you can also book tickets at the DB Service Centres in the train stations, but there you will have to pay a fee of 5 € for the service (it will be added to the cost of your ticket).

The tickets from the DB are unfortunately usually very expensive therefore it is important to look for special offers. The DB provides sometimes specials that you can find under the button "offers". Especially if you look below the button "travel offers of Germany" there are several specials. In general, it is always cheaper to book some weeks in advance, as you can get "save fares" (Sparpreise) then. It can really make a big difference in price, i.e. the normal price for a train from Kassel to Berlin is 85 € (without bahncard), whereas you can have the same ticket for 29 € (without bahncard) if you book well in advance.

In addition to booking early, here are some more ideas for cheaper travelling:

#### BahnCard 25

Firstly, the "Probe BahnCard 25", which is the choice for occasional travellers and families. The "Probe BahnCard 25" is for 3 months and costs 25 € and grants to reduce your journey costs by 25 % on the full price. ATTENTION: should cancel the "Probe BahnCard 25" by sending a letter to the DB right after you have received it (formal letter stating: "I would like to cancel my Probe BahnCard 25 at the next possible date").

If you don't do that it will **automatically** be converted into a 1-year subscription which is much more expensive and which will be automatically renewed each year!

#### Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket

To make a big saving it is also possible to use the "schönes Wochenende Ticket", which allows you to use all **regional trains** (RE, ERB etc. but not IC, ICE, EC) in all over Germany for one day. One ticket is valid for up to 5 persons travelling together and for parents travelling with their children aged 14 or younger. The price is only 39 € if you buy it online or on the ticket machine, so if you divide by 5 it is only 7,80 € per person. Just be careful about the time, because the ticket is only valid on either Saturday or Sundays and only one day between midnight and 3am the next day.

#### Ländertickets

For unlimited travelling for one whole day within a certain state the „Länder-Tickets“ the Ländner Ticket best choice. Travel can be on any day of the week within one of the German states (i.e. Hessen, NRW, etc.). The ticket can be used on all local trains, which includes the "RegionalExpress, RegionalBahn and the S-Bahn" in some cities. The price starts from 28 € for up to 5 persons travelling together or for parents travelling with any number of their children under 15 years.

#### Delays of trains

In case you have booked a ticket in advance, i.e. an online ticket, and at the station you find out that the train has a considerable delay, you should go to the information point or service centre of DB. They will give you information on alternative trains which you can take and mark your ticket accordingly, so that you won't have to pay for taking alternative trains on the same route. In case you are on a train which is too late to get your connecting train at another station, just talk to the train staff, they will change your ticket accordingly so that you can use other connecting trains.

## 2.2 Mitfahrgelegenheit.de

[www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de](http://www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de) is a platform for people who travel from one place to another by car and who are willing to take other people with them for a fee. It is a kind of 'organized hitch-hiking' which has become very popular in Germany and Europe during the last years, as the prices for train tickets continue to rise. Unfortunately the website for co-driving in Germany is only available in German language. However it should be possible for you to do organize a co-drive for yourself. Here you find a translation of the key terms of the website with a step by step guide:

### 1. Go to the website and choose the city you want to travel to

*Von* = From: type the city of departure

*Nach* = To: Type the city of arrival (you will have to click on the German names of the cities, i.e. Munich = München)

*Datum* = Date, Then click on *Suchen* (Search)

### 2. Contact the drivers

You will now find a list of people who are going from one city to the other. It will again be in German, but it should be ok if you get the key points like:

*Zeitpunkt* (Date)

*Uhrzeit* (Time)

*Kosten* (Price) Sometimes drivers don't indicate that, then you have to ask in your message

*Pl.* (Number of place available)

*Infos* (DB means it is a "train co-driving" offer, means that you can go on a regional train ticket with someone else > see chapter on train)

If you click on *Angebot* (offer), you will find more details on the trip. You will find the phone number or an email address to contact the driver. In the section *Kommentar* (commentary) he will describe where he can pick you up in the city of dep. And where he can drop you at the time of arrival. Most of the times drivers offer to pick you up/drop you at the train stations of the respective cities, i.e. Kassel Bhf Wilhelmshöhe. You should be careful if it say "Ausstieg an Autobahn", that means he only offers to drop you at the highway.

If an offer looks suitable you would send a text message to the driver saying something like:

➤ "Hello, I would like to drive with you from ... to ... on .. (date). Are there still places available, and how much would it cost? Best, ..."

Or in German (to increase the potential of reply, as some drivers might not speak English well):

➤ "Hallo, ich würde gerne am ... (date) von ... nach ... mitfahren, haben Sie noch einen Platz frei? Und was würde die Fahrt kosten? Beste Grüße, ...."

## 2.3 Couchsurfing.com

Couchsurfing (CS) is a network of travellers and hospitable people around the world, who would like to meet and host people from other countries at their place. It is a great alternative to hostels or hotels, if you are doing a short trip to another city, as it is much cheaper and it enables you to meet locals. Usually people would host you at their place for around 2-3 days, which means they would offer you to sleep on their couch or in some extra room for guests.

Couchsurfing is for free, but it is highly recommended to offer a small gift to the host, or to cook a nice meal form him/her or anything else to show your thanks. Besides saving loads of money (which can be crucial in cities like Paris or Brussels), it is great to meet all different

kinds of people. I (Tandiwe) did CS in many different countries like France, Netherlands, Italy, and Germany and it was always a great experience.

On this website you can create your own profile, like on facebook, and then click on "couchsurf" in order to find people who would offer a couch in the city you want to go to.

CS is a mutual thing, so the idea is that you would either offer a couch yourself to other travellers on your profile or (in case you don't have space or anything), you can offer to show someone around your city, have a coffee or drink with him/her etc. If you create your profile, it is a good idea to search for people who you already know, like friends or relatives, so that they can leave a reference for you. This will make you more trustworthy.

### **3. Communication**

#### **3.1 Calling phones from skype**

To call people in your home country on their mobiles, you can use skype.com. If you already have a skype account (a normal one with which you can call other people on skype), you will find the button "call phones" in the menu of your skype account. It will take you to the skype website, where you can either buy a "call-abo" for a certain country, i.e. calling on Indian cellphones for 60 mins. Per month for around 2 Euro per month. You can pay this via credit card or via the German EC-card with you will receive if you open a bank account in Kassel.

#### **3.1 Prepaid sim-cards**

There are probably tons of sim-cards that contain good tariffs to call your home country. Nevertheless one nice prepaid sim-card is called: LEBARA. Now days it is available in all smaller shops that sell small snacks, drinks or tabac, etc. (not supermarket). It might be good to study the leaflet of Lebara before you buy the Sim-Card because the costs differ from country to country. To Turkey it is only 9 Cent per minute but to Tanzania about 25 Cents. Still it creates the nice opportunity to call home wherever you are fastly with your mobile. Within Germany you pay also only 9 Cents per minute to call to other mobiles.

#### **3.1 Cellphone contracts**

Many companies are offering fixed contracts with a flatrate on calls or internet. You may go into a mobile shop to get information about the contracts in place, but be careful: most contracts are for at least one year, and they AUTOMATICALLY extended if you don't cancel them right away. If you want to make a one-year contract you can do so, but then you should make sure to write a letter to the respective mobile company IMMEDIATELY stating that you want to cancel your contract to the next possible date!!! (Formal letter stating: "I would like to cancel my mobile contract with the number xxxxx at the next possible date"). If you don't do that it will **automatically** be prolonged for another year, and then you'll have to pay even when you're back in your country after the MA programme.

## Recommendations for Kassel

### 4.1 University Sport

First of all: find out when the date is, where it is possible to sign in for sports. It differs from year to year so if you don't find out yourself, ask a German speaking person.

It is important to know because many courses have limited places and some courses are already full within minutes after the account of signing in is activated at this certain date at a certain hour. The webpage where you can sign in is:

<http://www.uni-kassel.de/hrz/db4/extern/Hochschulsport/index.php>

Unfortunately it is in German only.

Secondly: Before you sign in you need to activate your IT-account. It's not written anywhere but necessary for registering at a sports course. The easiest way (because the webpage is in German) is to go with your matriculation documents to the IT-centre at campus and they will give you a number that looks like "UK12345". This is your "Benutzername" that is also required when registering for sports. In a next step you have to create an IT-Account generally. But this is not relevant for the registering for sports. Here you only need this number (Benutzername).

Back to sports and the website: you find on the right side all Sport offers from the university. Or you click on the left side up "Sportangebot" (sport offers) to look at them in detail. To register, you have to press "Anmelden" and in the popping up window "anmelden" again. And again press on the upcoming page "weiter zur Anmeldung". Now you find a list of all courses, the time and on the right side the status if it is already full or not. If there is written "Kurs ausgebucht, Warteliste voll" there are no places available anymore. If you find the button "Anmelden" you can still join in.

BUT before you start there is an important information that you need.

You have to pay a basic fee of 5 Euros for one semester. Some courses are then for free, for others you have to pay additionally 10-15 Euros per semester. Despite of that, you have to pay this 5 Euros first before you can register for any. Do that by clicking on the very first line that is named with "Grundgebühr", click on the right button "anmelden" and fill in the form which looks like this:

- Anrede\*  Herr/man  Frau/woman  Herr/Frau oder Firma
- Titel
- Vorname\*
- Nachname\*
- Firma
- Straße, Hausnummer\*
- PLZ, Ort\*
- Land\*
- Telefon\*
- E-Mail\*



- Geburtsdatum (optional)
- Ich bin mit der Weitergabe meiner Daten an die Techniker Krankenkasse einverstanden
- I agree that my datas are given to the technical insurance (I wouldn't press this button)
- Benutzername\*(am Rechenzentrum)

Lastschrift (Means that they will book the fee of 5 Euros automatically from your account)

- Ihre Kontonummer\* account number
- Ihre Bankleitzahl\*
- Kontoinhaber\*  Vorname  Nachname / Firma  
wie oben

Now tick the sentence down: “ •  Ich akzeptiere die Geschäftsbedingungen dieser Bestellung.“. That means you are accepting the conditions. You get then an E-Mail after a while with a document that proofs that you are registered. This one you have to take to the sport course. Sometimes they want to see it. After you filled this you can register in all courses you like. It functions the same way with filling out this form.

#### 4.2 Getting a bicycle

In Berlin it is quite easy to get a second-hand bicycle for 20-50 euros on the flee market (*Flohmarkt*). Google “*Flohmarkt Berlin*” or “*Flohmarkt Mauerpark*” to find the dates and places of the flee markets (see also point 5.3 of this handbook). When you go back to your country you can resell the bicycle at the flee market or you aks in one of the bicycle shops whether they also sell 2<sup>nd</sup> hand bicycles. It's great to have a bicycle in Berlin in summertimes, so you should consider that. In Kassel it might be more difficult to get a cheap 2<sup>nd</sup> hand one but here you can also try to google “*gebrauchtes fahrrad Kassel*” (2<sup>nd</sup> hand bicycle Kassel).

#### 4.3 Local transport in Kassel: [www.kvg.de](http://www.kvg.de)

With our student ID card we can also use the public transport network both in Kassel City and surrounding Kassel in the area of Nordhessen. At the website “[www.kvg.de](http://www.kvg.de)” you will find the important information.

On the left side (blue-colored) you can search about news, tickets and etc. If you click on the buttons you will see more details in the middle of the page. Unfortunately the website is only in German available, but with a bit luck and patient you can find some information. Especially if you click on the buttons: “was fährt wann” (which transport is going when) which gives the possibility to search about connections and “was fährt wo” (which transport is going where) which shows more details about maps and tariff zones that may be of interest for your time in Kassel. Below you will find the possibility to search about: tourist, tickets, maps, ticket machines or leisure time etc. which are also very useful.

On the ride side you have the possibility to look about the connection in the “Nordhessischer Verkersverbund” which indicates the surrounding of Kassel. However, the NNV has also an own website: <http://www.nvv.de/>.

## Recommendations for Berlin

Berlin is a big city. You will have to take the U-Bahn, the S-Bahn or the Tram to move around. This is how the map of U-Bahn and S-Bahn looks like.



Confusing sometimes. First step in Berlin is to grab this kind of map in order to orientate yourself. They are available at every bigger station in Berlin.

Further more, like the kvg in Kassel, there exist a website of the local transport system in Berlin: [www.bvg.de](http://www.bvg.de). You can switch this webpage into English on the upper part.

On the right side then, you have the possibility to type in your starting place and your destination place and the bvg will offer you the best available connection.

Viel Spaß!

### 5.2 Useful links for Berlin:

[www.gratis-in-berlin.de](http://www.gratis-in-berlin.de)

This webpage offers you a wide overview of activities and current events in Berlin that are for free.

[www.zitty.de](http://www.zitty.de)

Berlin is full of people and full of activities. To have an overview of some activities, concerts, theatre, events, discussions, etc. you might have a look at the webpage of the zitty magazine. Here you can search by date or district what will take place and where.

### 5.3 Sunday in Berlin:

Usually on Sundays there are many secondhand markets around Berlin (where you can also buy cloth, kitchen stuff, etc). To be recommended is the one at Mauerpark (Gleimstraße 55, 10437 Berlin) in Prenzlauer Berg (district). There you find many many artists playing music, groups dancing around, a karaoke event takes place and people are just chilling together at the grass... . All this outside, at the park and not organized. That makes it very charming, all the artists and musicians are just people who bring there instruments and friends to the park and start playing and improvising out of fun. In summer its very crowded but still: nice place to go!

#### 4. Some ideas on how to fight a cold

Germany is cold in winter times and many people catch a cold or even influenza once in a while. Let's hope it doesn't happen to you, but if so, here are some ideas on (household) remedies besides aspirin or other painkillers.

**If you feel the first signs of a cold, you can try to prevent the outbreak**

- try "Meditonsin" or "Echinacea" (pharmacy)
- Vitamin C/Zink-Tablets (drugstore<sup>1</sup>)

**If you could not prevent it and end up with a painful sore throat**

- drink "Salbei-Tee" (sage tee), which helps to disinfect the throat (drugstore)
- Gurgle with Salviathymol (Pharmacy)
- Take tablets against a sore throat like "Dorithricin" or "DoloDobendan"

**If you develop a dry cough**

- Get some inhalation paste from the pharmacy like "Transpulmin" and put 2 cm of that into boiling water in a pot. Put your head above the pot and cover yourself with a towel, then inhale the steam for around 10 min. Repeat 1x per day until it gets better.

In case you need to go to a doctor your first choice would be a "Hausarzt" (general doctor). So if you type "Hausarzt Kassel" and then your address on google, you can find doctors near your house.

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<sup>1</sup> Drugstores are shops like DM or Rossmann, they sell a number of quasi-medical stuff, but for stronger medicine you will have to go to the Pharmacy